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REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES

Addendum*

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On 21 October 1997, the Committee on Conferences convened a resumed substantive session (404th meeting). The present addendum to the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/52/32) contains information on the work of the Committee at that session.

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1998-1999: CONFERENCE SERVICES

Introduction

1. At its 404th meeting, on 21 October 1997, the Committee considered the report of the Secretary-General on United Nations reform: measures and proposals (A/52/303), containing revised information regarding conference services for the biennium 1998-1999, together with the relevant programme narrative contained in document A/52/6 (Sect. 27E).

Discussion

2. Support was expressed for the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 and for the Secretary-General's reform package in the field of conference services, which, it was emphasized, was an essential substantive activity of the Secretariat. The post of Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services would involve functional authority for conference services throughout the Secretariat, which would lead to closer coordination and improved cost-effectiveness in the use of resources.

3. Support was also expressed for the establishment of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. Concern was expressed, however, lest the elimination of posts envisaged in the programme narrative, particularly in translation, affect the delivery of conference services. The view was also expressed that the Secretary-General could confidently be expected to utilize the resources requested to implement his mandate fully.

4. Replying to queries, the representative of the Secretariat assured members that the matter of post reductions envisaged at Vienna, which were higher than in New York and Geneva, had been carefully reviewed and, in any case, services at Vienna would not be sacrificed. In fact, the reductions would not affect the services provided at any duty station. In the translation area, in particular, technological advances made it possible for translators to produce first drafts on screen, thereby reducing the text-processing workload and increasing productivity in the documentation processing system. With a view to further increasing productivity, plans were afoot to introduce machine-assisted translation, beginning in 1998-1999. Any increase in translation workload would be shared by permanent staff and by expanded recourse to temporary assistance and contractual translation. One of the main concerns of the Secretariat in 1998 would be to develop uniform standards and coordinate resource policy, particularly in technology, so as to ensure the provision of services in the most efficient and effective way at all duty stations. While New York would lead that effort, Geneva and Vienna would continue to be responsible for the daily administration of their respective conference services.

5. The use of temporary assistance, which was necessary during periods of peak demand, was the practice at other offices and organizations within the United Nations system. No effort would be spared to ensure the most cost-effective

provision of temporary assistance through contractual arrangements beneficial to the Organization.

6. The Secretariat assured members that the new structure envisaged for Conference Services and the proposed reductions in resources and posts would not affect the volume or quality of the conference services provided by the Secretariat, particularly with regard to the timely translation and publication of documents in the official languages of the United Nations.

7. The view was expressed that the replies made by the representative of the Secretariat to members' queries were satisfactory.

Conclusion

8. The Committee on Conferences took note of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 submitted by the Secretary-General (A/52/6 (Sect. 27E)) and of the report of the Secretary-General on United Nations reform: measures and proposals (A/52/303).